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Reviews

A FRENCH READER. With Phonetic Transcriptions for First Year Students, by HUGH A. SMITH and JEANNE H. GREENLEAF. Henry Holt and Co. Pp. IX+267.

This excellent reader assumes that "the greatest value for the majority who study French in this country will always be a knowledge of French life, thought and literature, which comes almost entirely through reading." Much of the material is "not new," but the authors have "brought together for the first time in one book, for first year work, a considerable number of the texts that have been most successful in early arousing the student's interest and in inspiring him for further reading." The reading matter, which has been selected primarily for beginning college students, begins with a few simple tales; then come in order a part of *Sans Famille*, the delightfully ironic and easy *Pacha Berger, la Dernière Classe*, an excellent passage from *les Misérables* (*Cosette*), two typically bitter Maupassant stories, and some anecdotes and fables. The Hugo selection would gain in clearness and charm through an explanation of the background, with at least a hint of the identity of the charitable stranger; but in general the material is interesting and well chosen, and is not appreciably harmed by a few abridgments and modifications.

The scarcity of notes is unfortunate. There should at least have been a few more of the helpful paraphrases of difficult expressions like that on page 119. For instance the "canal" is abruptly introduced (50, 9) without comment; and constructions like that containing *ne* (112, 7), *ce n'est pas tout ça* (125, 17), *si on y allait* (159, 29), and *qu'on ne l'y prendrait plus* (179, 6), will be far from clear to first year students without a little explanation.

In the appendix there is a good set of questions, and sentences for translation, based upon alternating passages in the text. It might have stimulated interest in phonetic notation and have helped the cause of good oral work if these questions had been written phonetically. A table of the most necessary irregular verbs comes next.

The vocabulary is carefully made, and I am told that the class-room test reveals few if any omissions except *sourd*, though, to be sure, the words in the questionnaire do not seem to have been cared for, judging by the absence of *écolier* (Ex. 29, 1) and *sur* with the sense of "about" (Ex. 25, 5). The following entries seem to the reviewer capable of improvement:—

Absinthe. "A pale green liquor" is a peculiar definition.

Accordés and *affamé*. Why register these forms in addition to the infinitive?

Avec. "With" is not sufficient for *s'enfuit avec* (174, 16).

Déplaître. *Ne vous déplaît* (178, 13) is not satisfactorily cared for by the simple "displease."

Dire. The idiomatic English for the use on 162, 20, is "to think!"

Du has no definition fitting *monsieur du corbeau* (178, 20).

Galon, to be sure, is defined as "lace" by the dictionaries, but that word signifies to most English-speaking people what the French mean when they say *dentelle* (cf. 147, 20).

Grand has no definition suiting *quatre grands jours* (136, 12, and note).

Là. *C'est là* (178, 9) does not appear here or elsewhere.

Montagne. It seems pretty certain that the idiomatic equivalent for the use on page 104, 3, etc., is "the mountains," not the singular.

Par has no definition to suit *par un clair matin* (158, 3).

Pêche miraculeuse (161, 28) needs the stock English equivalent "draught," for *pêche*, but only "fishing" appears.

Thénardier (*la*, 125, 10, etc.). This sorry figure would seem to merit inclusion along with the other proper names.

Vas should be recorded separately, not under *va* (cf. *venez*).

Vive la France has the rather wooden rendering, "Long live France."

Volupté. Something better than "voluptuousness" seems needed for 138, 8.

Vos should be entered separately; it appears under *votre*.

The most novel and useful part of this book (for teachers who are sufficiently progressive to understand and use it) is the phonetic transcription of the earlier texts. This difficult task is accomplished with such rare success that criticism will seem audacious, especially as "the pronunciation transcribed is from the reading . . . of a native Parisian." Fortunately there is little to criticize in the way of actual error. The almost unavoidable typographical slips have been practically all eliminated in the second printing, now available; though I find [ɛs] (73, 27) for [ɛ s] and [kôtrə] (49, 2) and [fô] (15, 7) for [kô:trə] and [fô]. Admitting justification for difference of pronunciation in the ending *-ation*, it would seem wiser to adopt either [a] or [ə] consistently; but [ɛstalasjô] (95, 26) conflicts with [eksklaməsjô] (97, 14) and [admirəsjô] (97, 15). [sezi], with [e] for [ɛ] (25, 13), is heard but uncommon. The same would be true for [rwa] (13, 7) and [krwa] (19, 13), with [a] instead of [ɛ]. [katrijɛm] (11, 14) and [krije] (13, 28) are likewise less usual than the forms without [j].

The three important matters about which reasonable people may disagree and yet all be right—linking, quantity, and the

suppression of mute *e*—offer several debatable cases, though I have no wish to press unduly any fallacious idea of impossible consistency.

By dropping mute *e* a number of harsh consonant groups have been created,—[arbr ki] (11, 4), [rəturnra] (15, 4), [cən sra] (33, 1), [ty dvra] (33, 30), etc. With these we may compare [ty dəvra] (35, 12), [akərdə trwa] (3, 17), [rəstə po:vr] (7, 27), [e kə səl] (19, 21), etc. The groups [rpri], [rnri], etc., seem especially sophisticated for beginners.

Under linking one might contrast [və a] (3, 15) with [vez ale] (23, 5). On the whole, the tendency in this book is to link too much rather than too little; e.g., [āverz el] (65, 21). The verb final is usually carried over, but not in [prəmne ā lō] (43, 28) and [parle avek] (59, 14).

The absence of any sign to indicate the usual *liaisons* is rather unfortunate, especially in those cases in which two words linked are on different lines (e.g., 3, 12 and 13), since the letter linked is always included bodily in the word in which it occurs orthographically [nuz avō].

The usual linking sign is employed for another valuable purpose,—namely to attract to a preceding vowel an occasional consonant that, by the dropping of a mute *e*, might be forced by the student into an uncomfortable consonant group; e.g., [turnā-l do] (51, 9). At times this excellent device seems overworked.

The matter of quantity seems to be the least satisfactory element in the phonetic text. Too many vowels are marked long, length being indicated in all doubtful words and even in some for which there is no authority, and no allowance having been made for group stress. Among proclitic cases in which length seems unwisely indicated are [grā:d rife] (7, 17), [mefā:nt fam] (9, 19; 13, 18), [və: le fide:l] (23, 23), [tə:t ba:s] (29, 25), etc., etc. In such cases length can hardly be assumed unless the syllable be stressed; hence the [və mwa] of 63, 9 is the correct reading. Likewise, in adverbs, the reading [kurəʒəzmā]¹ (19, 1) seems preferable to [kyrjə:zmā] (15, 22) and [lō:gmā] (45, 23).

Other debatable cases of length are the following:— On page 71 [arəta:m] occurs close to [arivam].—*Prêtre* without length (23, 21) and *capitaine* and *romaine* (21, 20; 17, 24) with it seem peculiar. The [sé:ʒ ki] of 15, 10, is perhaps *possible* if we assume a pause after *singe*; therefore the [sé:ʒ ki]² of 15, 20, seems less likely, since the close association which brings about devocalization would tend to render the lengthening of *singe* improbable.—[tuʒu:rz ete] (19, 7) is a very extreme case of applying the “rules” of length.

¹The fifth character represents the sound of the initial consonant in *jardin*. Our printer has not the correct I. P. symbol.

²The second consonant here should bear a sign of devocalization but our printer has not the proper I. P. symbol.

The omission of any indication of breath-grouping would have been better understood if the quantity mark had been used as a guide for pause and stress; as matters now stand, the reader will have to depend upon punctuation and what help he can get from the omission or retention of mute *e*.

Devocalization is carefully indicated throughout the book.

The "table of French sounds" (p. ix) is evidently intended primarily to define the A. P. I. symbols, since the authors "take it for granted that the student has been taught the French sounds and knows how they differ from the English." This being the case, why is not the French word sufficient for this purpose without English "approximates"? There are two departures from the conventional A. P. I. alphabet,—(ō) instead of [ō] (which can be commended upon pedagogical grounds), and [g] instead of the I. P. sign (which has no real importance). As English approximates defining the nasals, there are words containing *m* and *n*; this seems unwise especially *sunk*, with its *ng* sound. Likewise the use of German *ü* and *ö* for [y] and [ø] is simply begging the question; even a clumsy English approximation is more helpful. The protest against the *ni* of *union* as an approximate equivalent of [ɲ] seems excessive, since its defect is trifling and can be easily corrected; whereas the suggestion of the *ng* of *singer* is a case of substituting the fire for the frying pan, for the acoustic and physiological contrast between [ɲ] and [ŋ] is sharp enough to those who have heard and imitated the provincial French [alman].

One incidental problem—from the pedagogical point of view—is the question as to just how our elementary students are going to be persuaded to take kindly to these "queer phonetic signs." This problem the Smith-Greenleaf *Reader*—like all the rest—leaves untouched.

The foregoing criticisms indicate few serious defects, and concerning many of them there will be respectable differences of opinion. The book is a real contribution to the study of French upon a sound phonetic basis, and a well edited reader into the bargain. It remains to be seen whether the American teaching profession is capable of appreciating work of this sort.¹

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¹ This review has profited by suggestions from Professor E. F. Hacker of the Ohio State University.